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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 3519
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 1714
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 4265
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1102
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1579
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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 5610
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0523
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 4644
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 6596
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9208
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000503

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, March 4-5, 2008

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Key stories in the media:

All media reported on the arrival of Secretary of State Condoleezza

Rice in the region. Ha'aretz quoted the Secretary as saying on Tuesday that Israel and the Palestinians can still reach a peace agreement by the end of the year, despite recent violence in Gaza. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that PM Olmert told Secretary Rice that Israel will continue to act forcefully against Hamas. Maariv reported that PM Ehud Olmert said that it will be impossible to reach an agreement in 2008 and that Secretary Rice expressed concern about the suffering of civilians in Gaza..

Ha'aretz and Israel Hayom quoted PA President Mahmoud Abbas as saying that "peace and negotiations are our strategic choice." Ha'aretz reported that he fell short of announcing a resumption of peace talks. The Jerusalem Post quoted PA officials in Ramallah as saying that Abbas rejected Washington's demand to return immediately and unconditionally to the negotiating table. The officials told The Jerusalem Post that while Abbas was ready to resume peace talks, he was seeking assurances that Israel would refrain from further military operations in Gaza. Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted Palestinian sources as saying that Abbas's discussion with Rice centered on the idea of a comprehensive cease-fire in the West Bank and Gaza. Ha'aretz quoted Hamas as saying that Rice's visit was unwanted and was intended to cover up the "crimes of the occupation."

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that this morning PM Ehud Olmert will convene the diplomatic-security cabinet to discuss Gaza. The media reported that the meeting will not rule out any actions, including a large-scale military operation. Maariv quoted the IDF as saying that Hamas fighters are less organized than Hizbullah's and that Ashdod has started preparations to brace for attacks by enhanced Grad rockets. As part of a diplomatic offensive, the Foreign Ministry will arrange for foreign delegations to visit to Sderot. Major media reported that important demonstrations condemning the Gaza operation took place among Israeli Arabs. Leading media reported that during her visit to Cairo, the Secretary announced that she had waived the Congressional restrictions withholding \$100 million in military aid to Egypt.

Major media reported that last night IDF troops killed Yusuf Samiri, the commander of Islamic Jihad in the central Gaza Strip, and at least three other armed militants. Israel Radio and other media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that a baby was also killed in the operation.

Leading media quoted PM Olmert as saying on Tuesday in a school in the Druze village of Julys that Israel will not accept a nuclear Iran and that it has the strength to protect itself from any threat.

The Jerusalem Post's Internet site quoted a Foreign Ministry officials as saying that Foreign Ministry spokespeople are refusing requests to appear on Aljazeera-TV because of what the ministry deems heavily biased coverage of the situation in the Gaza Strip. The ministry statement came a day after FM Tzipi Livni ripped into the satellite station at a meeting with ambassadors posted here, saying that "when depicting Israeli attacks, Aljazeera-TV abuses the situation on the ground by telling lies. Unfortunately, during these attacks, civilians were killed. I am not trying to change facts. But, of course, when it comes to Aljazeera-TV, everything is exaggerated." A Foreign Ministry statement specifically cited praises of Aljazeera-TV by senior Hamas official Mahmoud Zahar.

Yediot reported that security sources are opposed to allowing two French lawyers representing the family of Gilad Shalit to enter Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a group of American and Israeli lawmakers -- the latter including Benny Elon (National Union-National Religious Party) and Orit Noked (Labor) -- are planning to establish a U.S.-Israel joint study group to prepare foreign policy recommendations for the next U.S. administration.

The Jerusalem Post reported that police on Tuesday stopped Waqf Muslim trust officials from performing unauthorized construction work on the Temple Mount.

Leading media reported that a U.S. missile strike on Monday eliminated Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who was behind the November 28,

2002 attack on the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, in which 15 people, including three Israelis, were killed, and the failed

shooting down of an Arkia airliner on the same day.

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, March 4-5, 2008:

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Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Instead of focusing on Iranian and Syrian efforts to take control of Lebanon, the [upcoming Arab League] summit will deal with the burring issue of the occupied territories. Israel, not Hamas, will be forced to pay the bill."

Veteran journalist and former justice minister Yosef (Tommy) Lapid wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Talking with Hamas means breaking the international boycott being imposed on Hamas.... I believe that we have no choice but to hit them hard."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Democracies the world over need to internalize what is taking place here, to pin blame where it is due, and to condemn Hamas for its heartlessness toward its own people."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "Cooperation on environmental problems, as well as on water and health problems, should move forward regardless of the diplomatic negotiations."

Block Quotes:

II. "He Who Pays Last Pays Best"

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/5): "Since the Prime Minister's announcement that a two-state solution is an existential necessity for Israel, or in his own words, that without it 'Israel is finished,' then the price list [for Palestinians] has become more complex.... The Arab peace initiative, launched six years ago at the Arab League summit in Beirut and ratified in Riyadh last March, was aimed at isolating radical elements in the Arab and Muslim world. These same elements seek to exploit the escalation in Gaza in order to bury Israel's offer of normalized relations in exchange for withdrawal from the territories. It would appear, however, that the leaders of Egypt and Jordan, when asked to report on the progress in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, say that all of the outposts are still in place and that one rabbi, who heads a medium-sized party, has removed Jerusalem from the talks. Instead of focusing on Iranian and Syrian efforts to take control of Lebanon, the [upcoming Arab League] summit will deal with the burring issue of the occupied territories. Israel, not Hamas, will be forced to pay the bill."

II. If This Is War, then Let It Be War"

Veteran journalist and former justice minister Yosef (Tommy) Lapid wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/5): "Talking with Hamas means implicit recognition of Hamas. Talking with Hamas means recognizing the effectiveness of the pressure they are placing on Israel. Talking with Hamas means breaking the international boycott being imposed on Hamas.... I believe that we have no choice but to hit them hard. If this doesn't work, so let's do it harder -- no conquest of Gaza, but bombarding it.... Some will say that this isn't worth the hefty price we're going to pay for tranquility. I'm afraid we have no other choice."

III. "Hamas's Human Shields"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (3/5): "Hamas's brazen use of human shields is directly facilitated by the

international community's reluctance to address the issue and denounce the premeditated endangerment of ordinary people.... By staying silent on this fundamental moral issue, the international community becomes an accomplice to bloodshed both among the directly targeted Israelis and the unintentionally harmed Gazans. Principled despite its vilified reputation, Israel wrestles with a wrenching quandary callously imposed upon it. But Israel shouldn't be the only one to grapple with the ruthlessness of terrorists toward their human shields. Democracies the world over need to internalize what is taking place here, to pin blame where it is due, and to condemn Hamas for its heartlessness toward its own people."

IV. "Apart from the Security Problems"

Ha'aretz editorialized (3/5): "Dealing with the building waste is a measure of Israel's success in dealing with its environmental problems. It should also serve as a test case for the joint treatment by Israel and the Palestinians of environmental problems.... Cooperation on environmental problems, as well as on water and health problems, should move forward regardless of the diplomatic negotiations.... The effort that has been made recently by Palestinian and Israeli experts, along with environmental organization activists, to formulate an extensive and detailed agreement on dealing with environmental problems as part of a comprehensive diplomatic agreement is also worthy of encouragement. The treatment of waste must become a key element in any future negotiations."

JONES